

Opposition mounts as GM vote begins

By Shannon Jones
31 October 2015

Tensions are running high at General Motors plants as voting begins on a sellout agreement between GM and the United Auto Workers. The UAW is organizing a snap vote to prevent workers from considering its content and organizing opposition.

The contract, patterned after the Fiat Chrysler settlement, makes permanent the two-tier wage and benefit system, with the aim of driving out tier-one workers. It includes a miserly three percent wage increase to tier-one workers in the first and third years of the agreement and four percent lump sum payments in the third and fourth years. Retirees get nothing except a \$500 gift card.

There is widespread opposition to the contract among GM workers. The speed with which the vote is being pushed through points to the extreme anxiety on the part of the UAW that if workers really familiarize themselves with its terms they would never accept it.

Workers at the Fairfax, Kansas Assembly Plant voted Friday on the national agreement, less than two days after the UAW released contract details. A veteran Fairfax worker told the WSWS, “If it passes I will be in total shock. At the union hall a lot of people were pissed off. They had not posted any details of the local contract, and still wanted people to vote on it.

“I think everyone has their different issues. There will be two groups of tier-twos now. There are people that are looking at the whole issue. A lot of tier-one workers are pissed off over what we gave up and are not getting back. A friend and me sat down and figured out what we lost. It ended up being a difference of \$24,000 over the course of the contract. For tier one, one of the biggest issues are promises that didn’t hold true.”

At the GM Lake Orion Assembly plant north of Detroit, where GM has announced that 500 workers will be laid off at the facility starting in December, a number of workers stopped to talk to the WSWS

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A second-tier worker said of the contract, “All the workers here seem to want to vote ‘no.’”

People want to see the bad points, not just the good points that the union is highlighting. It seems if you don’t ask about it, the union won’t tell you. But how many people are going to have time to go through all 700 pages of the contract?

“When you ask the UAW questions, it is like ‘we are ok with it.’ It is laughable to think this offer is the best we can do. Why would you settle for that?”

“They rushed through the vote on the local agreement here. They gave us two days and no information. I wanted to know, why are we voting on this before the national agreement?”

He said of the \$8,000 signing bonus, “They are giving you \$10 now and taking back \$100 later. They are throwing that money in your face and hoping you won’t see the bigger picture.

“I don’t like it that it will take eight years to reach the top for tier-two workers. It doesn’t add up, and it doesn’t make sense.

“What we don’t want to happen is to see a third tier of temporary workers whose top pay will max out at \$19 an hour. You could rotate temps in and out to keep wages low.

A senior worker at Lake Orion said he had serious reservations about the contract. “The UAW is pushing for a quick vote. They are just giving you the highlights. They don’t show you the bad parts.”

He said the plant was very tense because of the announced layoffs. “People will be spread around everywhere. The mood is kind of somber. People are nervous about where they may be transferred. I live in Detroit. I was laid off from the Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly plant, and now I have to drive an hour out here to Lake Orion.”

With the aid of the UAW, GM is slashing costs by

employing outside contractors who earn a fraction of the pay of regular employees but who still must pay union dues. In many cases they work side-by-side with GM workers.

A Lake Orion worker employed by an outside contracting company said that workers at his firm make a maximum of \$18 an hour compared to the \$28 an hour for senior workers at GM. “The UAW is not for us. I pay union dues for nothing,” he stated bitterly. “They take trips to Las Vegas with our money.”

As an incentive to move older workers out of the plants, the contract includes a \$60,000 retirement bonus for up to 4,000 workers, only a small fraction of those eligible to retire.

A GM warehouse worker from Colorado said, “The contract is garbage. I wouldn’t even vote on it. One of the questions I asked is why negotiate a \$60,000 bonus for just 4,000 workers to take retirement? I think everyone should have the \$60,000 offer.

“The company wrote the contract up and the union just agreed to it.

“Plus, the raises for tier-two over eight years are baloney. Everything after the four-year life of the contract is null and void.”

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